

Testimony for Michigan Senate Judiciary Committee  
April 28, 2015  
Re: Senate Bill 4 (Religious Freedom Restoration Act)

Members of the Committee:

The bill under discussion today uses the idea of “sincerely held religious beliefs” to help justify its existence and its reasoning. As a disciple of Jesus, as a Christian minister, as a pastor serving in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and as a citizen of Michigan, I appreciate this chance to declare my opposition to this bill based on my own sincerely held religious beliefs.

Christianity follows the life and teachings of Jesus, or at least claims to. I’ve concluded over the last few days that this bill contradicts the teachings of Jesus. We’re taught, for example, that all people (even people we may think of as strangers or enemies) are our neighbors. All people merit our care and compassion and service. Perhaps in the well-known story of the Good Samaritan the priest and the Levite felt they could deny assistance to the unknown man at the side of the road based on “sincerely held” belief. Jesus clearly had no sympathy with that position. It baffles me that other people of Christian faith seek legislation that could open the door to legally protect actions similar to those Jesus condemns in this parable.

I also serve churches that welcome all people regardless of race or ethnicity or gender, marital status or physical ability, nationality or religious heritage, sexual orientation or gender expression. It grieves me that the legislation in front of this body could help defend discrimination against those covered by current civil rights protections as well as those without legal protection. Brothers and sisters, friends and loved ones both within and beyond my own community of faith could be subject

to discrimination and perhaps even harm if this bill passes. We're all equally beloved children of the Creator. My sincerely held religious beliefs ask me to accept the challenge of treating everybody with equal love and compassion and respect, not to defend my own fears and prejudices.

At its best, the government of Michigan seeks to serve the common good of all its citizens. At our best, those of us who follow the life and teachings of Jesus serve and love all equally without acting fearfully or judgmentally or defensively. There is no need for legal protection of people who may fall short of the faith mandate to love and serve all.

Any protections necessary to guarantee the expression and practice of faith are already available under the Constitutions of the United States and the State of Michigan. Senate Bill 4 is not necessary legally, nor truly justifiable as a defense for people of faith who say we seek to model our lives after the life and teachings of Jesus. That is the "sincerely held religious belief" of the denominations in which I serve. That is the sincerely held religious belief of many others whose position I represent today. And that certainly is my sincerely held religious belief.

And so, I speak today in opposition to Senate Bill 4.

Thank you for your attention and the opportunity to speak today.

Peace and grace.

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